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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the significant underrepresentation of linguistically and/or culturally diverse (LCD) students in gifted and talented programs due to the absence of adequate assessment procedures and programming for gifted minority students and the need for professionals in gifted and bilingual education to work together to overcome these barriers. It stresses that the absence of knowledge or misunderstanding about the culture, linguistic, and cognitive skills of LCD students results in limited educational policies, school programs, or educational services that address the unique needs of these increasing populations. Three major reasons are presented for the difficulties in assessing the interrelated factors of culture, bilingualism, and talent development: (1) variable definitions; (2) multiple components of each factor that provide different meanings; and (3) various methodologies used to study these factors. It is also argued that different philosophical, psychological, educational, and politic perspectives have influenced the conception of these factors. The need to shift from an old paradigm that focuses on the weaknesses rather than the strengths of gifted language-minority students to a new paradigm for identifying talent potential in culturally diverse populations is urged. (Contains 42 references.) (CR)

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In the past few decades, a major concern of researchers and educators in gifted education has been the significant underrepresentation of linguistically and/or culturally diverse (LCD) students in gifted and talented programs. The primary reason cited in the most recent studies conducted on this topic is the absence of adequate assessment procedures and programming for gifted minority students (Baldwin, 1987; Bernal, 1989; Castellano, 1995; Cohen, 1988; Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995; Frasier & Passow, 1994; Kitano & Espinosa, 1995; Masten, 1985; Mills & Tissot, 1995; Rhodes, 1992; Smith, LeRose, & Clasen, 1991). The absence of knowledge or misunderstanding about the cultural, linguistic, and cognitive skills of LCD students results in limited educational policies, school programs, or other educational services that address the unique needs of these increasing populations.

According to the 1990 census, approximately 4.2 million youngsters aged 5 to 17 who speak a non-English language at home speak Spanish (Waggoner, 1995). The majority of members of the Hispanic/Latino group are Spanish/English bilingual and their native language is usually Spanish. The range of proficiency skills in the two languages can vary widely, from fluent bilingualism to limited communicative skills in either one of the two languages. Bilingual children may develop their two languages at different proficiency levels, at different developmental stages, and in different formal and informal settings.

In general, studies in bilingual education have supported the idea that bilingualism is a complex phenomenon involving personal and socio-cultural dimensions (Baker, 1993; Cummins, 1991; Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992; Snow, 1992). A parallel condition exists in education of gifted students; researchers in gifted education have also addressed the complexity of giftedness and the description of its factors (Grinder, 1985; Minks & Mason, 1993; Renzulli, 1994; Sternberg & Davidson, 1986; Tannenbaum, 1983). Both bilingualism and talent development are multidimensional phenomena involving cognitive, affective, cultural, environmental, and situational factors.

The U.S. Department of Education report, National Excellence: A Case for Developing

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America's Talent (1993) states that "special efforts are required to overcome the barriers to achievement that many economically disadvantaged and minority students face" (p. 28). Various sections of this report clearly address the need to identify and nurture talents in youngsters of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. It is clear from the extremely limited number of studies and educational practices which have focused on the dynamics of culture, bilingualism, and talent development in LCD students that insufficient information exists to describe the socio-emotional and cognitive characteristics of this target population (Frasier & Passow, 1994; Castellano, 1995; Cohen, 1988; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Kitano & Espinosa, 1995).

Researchers in bilingual and gifted education have struggled with the assessment of these interrelated factors (culture, bilingualism, and talent development) for three major reasons: (1) variable definitions; (2) each factor has multiple components that provide different meanings; and (3) various methodologies have been used to study these factors separately and combined. Additionally, over the years, different philosophical, psychological, educational, and political perspectives have influenced the conception of the factors mentioned above.

For the past 30 years, in-depth studies have been conducted in the field of gifted education about definitions, identification systems, and development of youngsters who demonstrate talent or have the potential to demonstrate talent or high performance in one or more academic areas. An increasing body of knowledge is available in the field with respect to these issues. During the last few years, researchers in this field have increasingly turned their attention to the underrepresentation of some populations in programs for the gifted such as gifted females, gifted students with learning disabilities, gifted economically disadvantaged students, and gifted minority students. The last two groups have also been targeted by federal and state policies. For example, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act of 1988 established that "outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor" (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 26). Moreover, one of the missions of The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (Renzulli, Reid, & Gubbins, 1990) is to place emphasis on "identifying the research needs of economically disadvantaged youth, individuals of limited English proficiency, individuals with handicaps, and other special populations that traditionally have been underserved in programs for gifted and talented students" (p. 1).

The evolution of the study of bilingualism has similarities with the field of gifted education, as researchers and practitioners in bilingual education have focused on defining bilingualism and developing theories and educational practices on the ability and use of more than one language (Baker, 1993; Cummins & Swain, 1986; MacLaughlin, 1984). As within the field of gifted education, social and political forces have influenced the provision of services for the specific needs of a portion of the society.

In the United States, bilingual and ESL (English as a Second Language) programs have been created primarily to respond to the needs of non-English or limited English speaking students who are continuously arriving in this country (Baker, 1993; Crawford, 1991; Keller & Van Hooft, 1982). In general, U.S. bilingual programs are transitional in nature, and the bilingual student or limited English proficient (LEP) student is moved as quickly as possible into the

monolingual English instruction without maintaining the native language. As Baker (1993) points out, there is a clear difference between "a classroom where formal instruction is to foster bilingualism and a classroom where bilingual children are present, but bilingualism is not fostered in the curriculum" (p. 151). Essentially, bilingual and ESL programs differ in the type of instruction. In the first case, the curriculum is developed in two languages, and second language learning is built upon the student's first language. In the second case, ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction, students receive "pull-out" classes in the majority language for a few hours each week. The rest of the time the student is in the regular classroom, where the instruction is given in English. This is called submersion or "sink-or-swim language instruction" (Baker, 1993; Crawford, 1991; McLaughlin, 1984). However, in both types of programs the objective is mostly to shift the student from the home, minority first language to the dominant, majority second language (Baker, 1993; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Crawford, 1991).

According to Bialystok and Hakuta (1994), learning a second language is a cognitive task in itself. Cohen (1988) points out that gifted limited English proficient or language-minority students are usually unable to express themselves well in English, and subsequently their talents are unknown because of their language limitations and not their lack of talents. One of the main reasons for this is that the assessment tools and procedures commonly used in gifted programs rely upon measures and techniques which are primarily dependent on English oral and written language (Hartley, 1987). Recent studies suggest that flexible criteria using multiple sources to assess talents in linguistically and culturally diverse students is needed in order to identify and nurture students' outstanding abilities (Castellano, 1995; Cohen, 1988; Kitano & Espinosa, 1995). Indeed, all children benefit when multidimensional assessment procedures are used to explore their interests, abilities, and learning styles.

The most recent studies in bilingualism are consistent with the hypothesis that the development of a second language can have positive effects on cognitive skills (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Hakuta, 1987; Hakuta & Gould, 1987). In this regard, Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) explain that "bilingual speakers have two linguistic systems for expressing their thoughts" (p. 10). Two cognitive mechanisms are particularly developed in bilingual children, the switching between their two languages, and transferring information from one language to the other.

Research in gifted education and in bilingual education has indicated that, in general, the education system has focused attention on the weaknesses rather than the cognitive strengths of linguistically and culturally diverse students (Barkan & Bernal, 1991; Davidson, 1992; Hakuta & Gould, 1987; Kolesinski & Leroux, 1992). Lack of information and misconceptions of learning and cognitive styles' preferences among language minority students have also been mentioned (De Leon, 1983). Addressing the latter, Hartley (1987) argues that "many cultural groups value listening and learning and encourage considered thought before speaking. What appears to be slowness may only be what a student knows as correct behavior" (p. 6).

Each society or culture values and encourages the development of certain talents or "intelligences" (Gardner, 1993) in its youngsters, while simultaneously overlooking or dismissing others (De Leon, 1983; Tannenbaum, 1986). For example, from Brickman's (1988) point of view, gifted students with foreign languages or the "multilingual gifted" have been

neglected and often excluded from gifted and talented programs in the United States. Linguistically and culturally diverse students come from cultures where special talents are valued but not recognized by the majority culture (Bermúdez, Rakow, Márquez, Sawyer, & Ryan, 1991; Cohen, 1988). On the other hand, with respect to culture and the development of language proficiency, Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) believe that "each learning situation, as well as the criteria for 'success' in that context, is created through the opportunities and constraints of language, brain, mind, self, and culture" (p. 206).

Very few educational models or programs have been specifically designed to identify and develop talents in linguistically and culturally diverse students. Furthermore, according to Bermúdez and Rakow (1993), there is an absence of specialized programs or instructional models focusing on gifted LEP students in gifted education. These programs can promote primary and second language development as well as cultural expression through the different academic areas. "Model Rocketry and the Space Sciences for the Gifted" (Cary, 1990) and Project EXCEL, developed in San Diego Unified School District (Hermanson & Perez, 1993) are two examples of such programs. Another program which addresses this goal is the Tucson Unified School District program, GATE, which integrates bilingual education and gifted education focusing the attention on limited English proficient (LEP) and other minority students (Barkan & Bernal, 1991).

Essentially, the transition from an old paradigm to a new one is a "reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications" (Kuhn, 1970, p. 85). The actual paradigms in gifted education and the studies conducted in the field seem to describe a reality in which opportunities for children of cultural and linguistic backgrounds other than the "majority group" are denied. Although this reality has been addressed and described by researchers and practitioners in the United States with respect to Hispanics and Native Americans, the underrepresentation of linguistically and culturally diverse children in gifted programs is a worldwide problem.

While some researchers in gifted education advocate new paradigms for identifying talent potential in culturally diverse populations (Frasier & Passow, 1994), researchers in bilingual education are trying to connect their field with programs for the gifted to meet the needs of LCD children (Barkan & Bernal, 1991).

Whether using the terms gifted LEP, LCD gifted, gifted ESL, or gifted bilingual, these official and theoretical terminologies are addressing the particular characteristics of a child who demonstrates talent potential or outstanding talents while simultaneously developing two languages. Language proficiency depends on the use and meaning of language in context (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994), and in some ways, talent development also depends upon these two factors.

The identification and nurturing of talents in linguistically and culturally diverse children will benefit not only from new research about the personal, affective, and cognitive needs of this population, but also from the recognition that a constantly changing society celebrates and

promotes the diverse expression of talents in its youngest generations.

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